

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

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***Re: Senate Bill 258 – An Act Prohibiting the Use of Trans Fat
in Connecticut Food Service Establishments***

Co-chairman Handley, Co-chairman Sayers,
members of the public health committee,

Please accept this testimony in support of Senate Bill 258, an Act introduced by State Senators John McKinney and Andrew Roraback to prohibit the use of artificial trans fat in Connecticut restaurants.

The science implicating trans fat in raising the risk of serious chronic disease is essentially iron clad. As summarized in recent review articles in the journal *Atherosclerosis* and others, trans fat has been shown to raise blood markers of inflammation, adversely affect blood lipid levels, and damage the lining of blood vessels. Population studies suggest a strong link between trans fat intake and the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. It is, in a word, poison.

Conservative estimates indicate that trans fat alone contributes to 50,000 deaths a year in the U.S., including 500 in Connecticut. Since we know restaurants contribute more than 1/3 of the trans fat in the American diet, it is reasonable to conclude that Senate Bill 258 could save approximately 170 lives a year in Connecticut.

Trans fat was first introduced into the food supply in an apparently innocent attempt to reduce the adverse effects and mimic the desirable commercial properties –stability and high melting point- of saturated fats. The trans fat era was ushered in by food packages that boldly proclaimed “no tropical oils!” which had in turn been introduced in the late 1980s to replace highly saturated animal fats. Palm kernel oil, and coconut oil are among the very few highly-saturated plant oils, and about as bad for health as the animal fats they replaced.

Eventually, and without much help from food labels, the word about “tropical oils” got out. In 1990, the Council on Scientific Affairs of the American Medical Association published a position statement calling for clear disclosure to the public that tropical oils were highly saturated, and potentially dangerous.

With the writing on the wall, if not the food package, the creative food industry solution was to invent a new kind of fat – trans fat.

An industrial process called partial hydrogenization produces trans fat. The trans configuration causes fat molecules to pack closely together, resulting in the desirable commercial properties found in saturated fat. Regrettably, while trans fat reliably extends the shelf life of foods, it clearly shortens the shelf life of people eating those foods- and more so than saturated fat ever did.

Trans fat is a food industry experiment gone bad – a mistake we have to correct by eliminating this chemically engineered, toxic food additive. That is why I fully support Senate Bill 258 which would prohibit restaurants from using trans fat in their food preparation.

Those who call our efforts “nanny-state meddling” are seriously misguided. Consider if lead improved the texture of ice cream, arsenic made French fries crispier, or a dollop of dioxin gave your salad dressing extra zest. Would it be acceptable to add these known

poisons to our food? Should you, as the consumer, need to inquire about them at every restaurant?

Like dioxin, trans fat contributes to cancer risk. Like lead, arsenic, and mercury, trans fat is a slow poison. Chefs are not permitted to explore the culinary properties of known poisons in their recipes, and nobody seems to be railing against it. Trans fat, quite simply, should be added to the list.

The Connecticut Restaurant Association doesn't dispute the fact that trans fat is a killer that needs to be removed from the American diet. Yet, the Association still opposes this bill, arguing that market forces are prompting restaurants to change anyway. So, they ask, "why do we need a law against it?"

Of course, the Association fails to tell you that the principal market force driving the transition away from trans fat today is the New York City Board of Health. That's right a government agency that had the courage to ban trans fat from New York City Restaurants in the name of public health.

In fact, roughly a year before New York City passed its trans fat ban, New York City Health Commissioner, Dr. Thomas Frieden, proposed a voluntary withdrawal of trans fat by New York restaurants. But, as you might imagine, very little happened. Why should it? Consumers know trans fat is bad for them, but in restaurants, are not told it's there. Consumer ignorance in this case leaves the restaurants blissfully free to maintain the status quo.

I believe the state has an important role to play in this case. The restaurant industry simply hasn't acted fast enough to remove trans fat, and public health officials have a responsibility to ensure that this deadly substance is not only removed from our food supply, but that it never returns.

We expect government organizations such as the FDA and EPA to identify poisons and protect us from them. Most of us figure if a food additive is bad enough to be banned, it will be. And if it's not banned, then perhaps it's not really so bad- and we don't need to worry about it. Trans fat is cause for worry.

Just because something already happens to be in our food does not mean it deserves to stay. When it comes to removing trans fat from our food, we should, as the saying goes, get the lead out.

I commend Senators John McKinney and Andrew Roraback for having the courage to propose and advocate for this important legislation, and I commend the Public Health Committee for holding this public hearing today.

The introduction of this bill has already done Connecticut a great service by raising awareness for the harmful effects of trans fat. I urge this committee and this legislature to finish the job by passing this important legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David L. Katz